



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History **2 – 8 April 2012**



3 Apr 1939 President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the **National Defense Act of 1940**, which provided the Army Air Corps more than 48,000 personnel, a \$300 million budget, and 6,000 airplanes. It also authorized the Air Corps to train black pilots. At right, a P-47 Thunderbolt of the U.S. Army Air Forces.



8 Apr 1942 **“Flying the Hump.”** A strategic objective of Allied forces in World War II was to supply Chinese forces fighting Japan. The Allies used an overland supply route that ran from India through Burma to China, but the Japanese cut this route in early 1942. On 8 April, two



DC-3s (later purchased in huge numbers as C-47 Skytrains) transported gasoline and lubricating oil over the Himalaya Mountains from eastern India to southern China to begin World War II's largest airlift operation. On one of the earliest missions, eight airplanes carried the fuel and oil to service the B-25 bombers from the “Doolittle Raid.” From December 1942 through the close of the operation in November 1945, the airlift delivered nearly 740,000 tons of cargo. Over half of this total was transported during the last eight months of the war. (Cockpit photo at left from *LIFE* magazine).

7 Apr 1945 Twentieth Air Force launched the **first fighter-escorted B-29 raid on Japan**. Acquisition of the island of Iwo Jima, after heavy fighting in February and March, made this raid possible by providing a base within fighter range of Japan.

3 Apr 1967 **First Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF).** Chief Paul W. Airey (at right) was installed as the first CMSAF. During World War II, Airey was a radio operator and gunner on B-24 bombers and is credited with 28 combat missions in Europe. He had to bail out of his flak-damaged aircraft, was captured and became a prisoner of war from July 1944 to May 1945. Airey spent much of his career as a first sergeant. In 1966, the Air Force began a search for “the best qualified and most impressive individual” in the service to be the first CMSAF.

Chief Airey passed away on March 11, 2009. Read his biography in [Air Force Magazine](#).

The CMSAF serves as the personal adviser to the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force on the welfare, readiness, morale, and proper utilization and progress of the enlisted force.





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7 Apr – 13 May 1972 **Operation CONSTANT GUARD I.** This deployment helped stop a full-scale North Vietnamese invasion of the South. The USAF moved 12 squadrons and 200 aircraft from the CONUS to bases in Southeast Asia. The units were then in position to support the Operation LINEBACKER I aerial interdiction campaign against the enemy offensive.



4 Apr – 16 Sep 1975 **South Vietnam evacuation.** As communist forces took over South Vietnam, more than 130,000 refugees fled by sea and air. The Vietnamese refugee airlift, the largest aerial evacuation in history, included a series of overlapping operations: Babylift, New Life, Frequent Wind, and New Arrivals. The U. S. Air Force, working with the Navy and private contractors, flew more than 50,000 refugees from Southeast Asia to islands in the Pacific Ocean and eventually to new homes in the United States. Aircraft involved included C-141, C-130, CH-53, HH-53 and C-9. (Historynet.com photo at left by Ms. Kathy Manney.)

On 4 Apr 1975, a C-5 crashed in an emergency landing near Saigon while flying the first mission of **Operation Babylift**. It was carrying South Vietnamese children and their escorts from Tan Son Nhut AB in Saigon to Clark AB. Only 176 of the 314 passengers survived the crash. First Lt Regina Aune, a flight nurse aboard the C-5, ignored her broken leg and other injuries to help evacuate nearly 80 children from the wreckage. She later received the 1975 Cheney Award. The C-5 pilot and copilot, Captains Dennis W. Traynor III and Tilford W. Harp, received the Air Force Cross for extraordinary heroism.

Despite this tragedy, the operation was a success as C-141s and commercial planes moved 1,794 orphans from South Vietnam and Thailand to the U.S. through 9 May.



5-6 Apr 1986 **Osan fuel explosion.** After a tank of jet fuel exploded at Osan Air Base, four C-141 Starlifters and one H-3 Jolly Green Giant helicopter from the 63rd Military Airlift Wing delivered fire suppressant foam to the base. The aircraft also evacuated burn victims to Seoul for treatment.



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5 Apr 1991 Operation PROVIDE COMFORT. From 5 Apr to 15 July, Military Airlift Command units flew more than 7,000 tons of supplies to northern Iraq, southeastern Turkey, and western Iran to help more than a million Kurdish rebels who fled from Iraq after being defeated by Iraqi forces. U.S. Air Force C-5, C-141, and C-130 aircraft airlifted more than 7,000 tons of relief supplies to Kurdish refugees who had fled their homes after Iraqi forces threatened to exterminate them. The operation later provided aerial protection for a security zone in northern Iraq so that the Kurds could return to their homes. This area became a no-fly zone forbidden to Iraqi aircraft when Operation PROVIDE COMFORT was replaced by Operation NORTHERN WATCH on 1 Jan 1997.

